

VZCZCXRO5757
RR RUEHHM RUEHLN RUEHPB
DE RUEHKO #2074/01 1072308
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 172308Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1061
INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 0264
RUEHSK/AMEMBASSY MINSK 0112
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0976
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 5743
RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA 5733
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA 8373
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 8920
RUEHKS/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 6924
RHMCSUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 002074

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ENRG](#) [SOCI](#) [PARM](#) [TRGY](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: CHERNOBYL DISASTER COMMEMORATED IN TOKYO

TOKYO 00002074 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) Summary. On April 16, Japanese anti-nuclear and Chernobyl assistance organizations hosted a 20th anniversary symposium on the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Yuri Scherbak, current Foreign Policy Advisor to outgoing Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) Speaker Lytvyn and former Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States, gave the keynote address where he discussed the health and social consequences of the accident and explained how the disaster was a good example of the need for democratic thought in both the political and S&T realms. Japanese panelists focused on the need to understand the overall social consequences of the disaster to prevent a future reoccurrence of this tragedy. Unlike previous such seminars where the discussion often turned to nuclear non-proliferation and criticism of nuclear weapons holding states, the featured speakers and panelists limited their discussions to the disaster. End Summary.

2. (U) On April 16, ESToff attended a Symposium held in Tokyo to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the April 26, 1986 Chernobyl Disaster. The four-hour symposium was sponsored by several Japanese Chernobyl aid assistance groups and the Citizen's Nuclear Information Center (CNIC), a fairly active anti-nuclear group in Japan. Over 400 individuals attended the day's events, which included a lecture by Yuri Scherbak, current Foreign Policy Advisor to outgoing Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) Speaker Lytvyn and former Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States, as well as a panel discussion, photo exhibits and the premier showing of a 25-minute documentary on the liquidators, or the individuals sent in to clean up the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant after Unit Four exploded. Unlike previous such seminars where the discussion often turned to nuclear non-proliferation and criticism of nuclear weapons holding states, the featured speakers and panelists limited their discussions to the disaster.

3. (U) Ambassador Scherbak gave the keynote address, during which he called Chernobyl the greatest nuclear catastrophe in the history of mankind. He said the disaster destroyed the nuclear industry's optimistic view about the safety and secure development of atomic energy. Chernobyl -- a "monster of the Soviet military-nuclear complex" that was followed by government lies and deception -- was symbolic of the dangers posed to mankind by "technological super systems." Scherbak argued that the disaster expressed the importance of democratic thought, not only within the political system, but

also within the field of science and technology, as the tragedy was ultimately caused by human error and a totalitarian system. It is critical to have civil society involved in judging the costs and benefits of nuclear power to provide a non-governmental perspective to the discussion.

¶4. (U) Scherbak then turned to the situation in the Soviet Union directly following the accident. He talked about secret orders to evacuate senior officials, the delays in

SIPDIS

informing citizens of what had occurred, and the sacrifices made by the liquidators to control the raging fire and contain the spewing radioactivity. Scherbak also discussed the health and social consequences of the disaster, touching on the increased cancer rates and immunodeficiency or "Chernobyl AIDS", loss of homes and employment, distrust of the government and international institutions such as the IAEA and WHO, and the psychological suffering and complete loss of optimism in those exposed to Chernobyl. He explained that many in Ukraine feel that international organizations have downplayed and underreported the number of victims, and said that Chernobyl related groups plan to release new figures that will be substantially higher to "reveal the truth" of the accident at an upcoming conference to be held in Kyiv. (Note: In a follow-up conversation with ESToff, Scherbak also said that he would be in the United States on April 26 to help commemorate the Chernobyl disaster.)

¶5. (U) Scherbak then returned to his earlier comments on bringing balance to the discussion on nuclear energy. He told the large number of audience members that it was not his intent to get them to start demonstrating against nuclear power plants, calling for their immediate closure -- something that was very possible, given the nature of the audience. Instead, Scherbak said it was unrealistic to close down all nuclear power plants given current energy needs worldwide and concerns over rising CO2 emissions. Yet, it is

TOKYO 00002074 002.2 OF 002

important to thoroughly consider accidents such as Chernobyl and not forget the human suffering and environmental devastation that it caused. Understanding the risks of nuclear power is critical. Scherbak concluded that it is important to create the safest possible way forward for the further development of atomic energy.

¶6. (U) After Ambassador Scherbak concluded his remarks, the symposium hosted a panel discussion entitled "What Happened, What Continues to Occur?" The three Japanese panelists included Tetsuji Imanaka, Professor of Nuclear Engineering at Kyoto University, Katsumi Furitsu, a medical doctor from Osaka who has been actively involved in Chernobyl assistance programs, and Ryuichi Hirokawa, a renown photographer who has traveled extensively to Chernobyl to photograph the aftermath of the disaster. The panelists focused much of their comments on the need to understand the overall social consequences of the disaster in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and not to just look at the rates of cancer and other diseases. There are many more victims who succumbed to poverty and other social problems, and it was important to understand this to prevent future accidents of this scale. The panelists also criticized the data released from the IAEA Chernobyl Forum held last September. Some of the panelists claimed that the IAEA as well as the Hiroshima-based Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF) were not accurately depicting the true number of Chernobyl victims.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The symposium was a solemn commemoration of the tragedy that occurred twenty years ago in Chernobyl. Unlike typical CNIC sponsored events, comments were fairly balanced while underscoring the need to prevent similar disasters in the future. Anti-nuclear events in Japan often involve some kind of criticism levied at the United States, whether at the possibility of Japan hosting U.S. nuclear aircraft carriers or on some aspect of U.S. nuclear weapons

programs. This time around, the only palpable criticism of the United States that ESToff saw was in a multi-color brochure included in the packet of handouts given to participants that protested the hosting of a nuclear carrier in Yokosuka.

SCHIEFFER